

Men's changing roles

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CO-COMPILER'S COMMENTS

The roles of men and women have been defined and defined again since the beginning of time. And, for some reason, men keep getting a more fair deal in the end. Or have they?

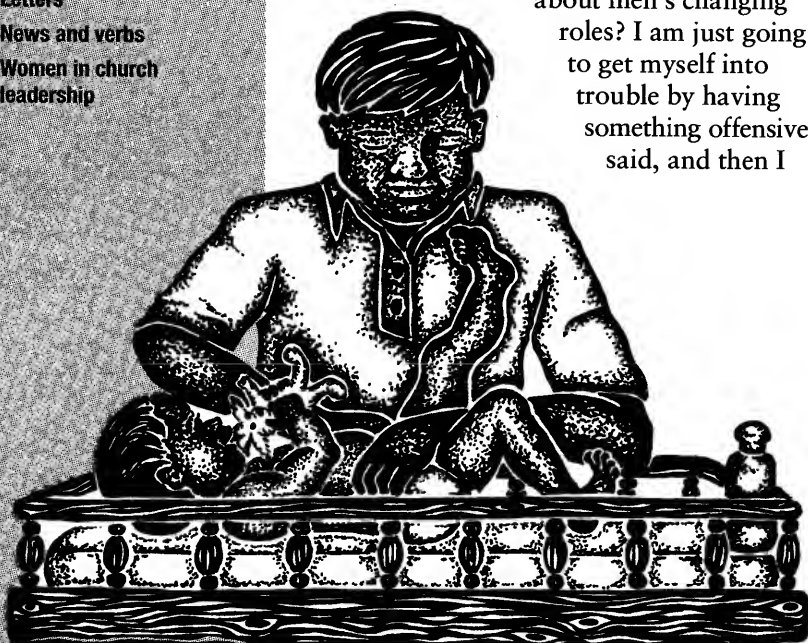
My husband at times tells me of the anxiety some men feel to be the financial providers for their families. I say better you than me. I have never been a numbers person, so in my marriage we decided my husband would take care of this aspect.

After I had agreed to help out on this issue of *Women's Concerns Report*, I had to ask, what had I gotten myself into? I am a young Latina woman, what do I know about men's changing roles? I am just going to get myself into trouble by having something offensive said, and then I

will hear it at my church and in the community. But then I thought about my childhood and what I was taught and about the experiences I have gone through, and how that has impacted my family life today. I told myself I had a responsibility to know something about men's roles, because I have two female children who have to live in this society.

My husband and I constantly struggle with what are the appropriate roles we should be in; him especially. He wants to be a very hands-on and involved father and husband in the home. He feels secure changing diapers and cleaning toilets, but we get mixed messages from our families and surroundings. My mother-in-law, who congregates with a Latino Pentecostal Church, tells my husband that it is biblically wrong for him to be changing our daughters' diapers and bathing them. She backs it up with the reference in the Old Testament about fathers not seeing their daughters naked. We do not know whether to be upset with her or to feel sorry for her. Then there are the looks my husband gets when he goes to our local mall alone with our daughters for some play time and lunch; women look at him and give him this 'you poor man' look as he struggles to clean up spilled juice and get our 1-year-old secured in a seat.

Also, I, at times, give mixed signals about what I believe are appropriate roles for men. I say with my mouth that we should



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I say with my mouth that we should share in every task, but I show with my actions that he does not clean the kitchen good enough by redoing it myself, or by showing anxiety and worry when I leave the girls in his care when I need to go to school.

share in every task, but I show with my actions that he does not clean the kitchen good enough by redoing it myself, or by showing anxiety and worry when I leave the girls in his care when I need to go to school. I know that as a man my husband is capable of doing these things, and I wonder what I am teaching my daughters about men's and women's roles when I do everything at home just because I feel I can do it better.

I was raised in a single parent home with my mother. She took care of all aspects of family life. My mother was the one in charge at home—at least she was until she remarried, and then her role was so different. I was very confused. How could she go from being totally in charge to waiting on a man, and in turn teaching me by example? I struggled to understand where my place was and my role.

Church was even more confusing. How could a place where the majority of congregants were women be led by only one man? The men's roles were preaching and teaching adult Sunday school, and women were only to teach children. Women were good enough to fill the pews, but not preach from the pulpit. I was not encouraged as a child or youth to nurture my leadership gifts in the church. However, my church has come a long way since

then. I am happy to say we now allow women to teach adult Sunday school, and preach from the pulpit on Sundays, though not without some grumbling. It is now the role of men to receive spiritual nourishment from women at church, instead of always giving; how can this not be a good thing? My church is special in our Latino Conference on the East Coast in this way. But ordaining women as pastors is a whole other can of worms. I pray for the day that we can encourage our Latina women who feel called to be ministers to go forth with a blessing. It may be in my children's time, but I am not giving up. At times I struggle with remaining at a church that does not encourage the gifts of women as equally as they do men's. I think of my daughters and the harm it can do to them if they are not nurtured as the boys are. We have discussions with the pastor and he tries to be supportive to us, but it is intimidating for him to feel that he could be the one to trouble the water.

Whatever roles men feel that they have, positive or negative, it affects women directly and vice versa. Power is a dangerous thing, but can be used for some good; especially the power of prayer. Through life experiences, education, and many hours and days of prayer and mentoring, I have been enlightened by the many gifts both genders have to offer. Because men hold the power in our society, a big challenge is upon their shoulders, and perhaps their biggest role is to fight for the equal treatment of their wives, daughters and mothers. But they are not alone. Women are working and dedicating their lives for this cause too. I am hopeful, after seeing the determination of my husband, to see a more just and a safer world for our daughters.

—co-compiled by Moniqua Acosta

The MCC Committees on Women's Concerns believe that all women and men are made in God's image and called to do God's work. We strive to work for the dignity and self-development of Mennonite, Brethren-in-Christ and Mennonite Brethren women, and to encourage wholeness and mutuality in relationships between women and men.

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A little less than a year ago, an issue of *Women's Concerns Report* focused on "Women's changing roles" (July–August 2003). In this companion issue, we try to include the voices of both men and women who are affected by the changing roles of men.

I guess it is inevitable that as soon as we start talking about "changing gender roles," people naturally think of the changing roles of women and men at church. At some churches, you now find men in the nursery while women are preaching. Admittedly, though, that is still the exception at most Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. In this issue, many of the writers focus on these changes at church. In the "Women's changing roles" issue, I listed a number of Bible verses that support women's public leadership at church. The Bible is filled with these verses. However, this issue also focuses on the changing gender roles in the family and in society.

Since these changes affect families and society, no one—from a Conservative Mennonite Church family in Ohio to a Mennonite Church Canada single man from Manitoba to a Mennonite Brethren/Mennonite Church USA couple in southern Texas—can escape these changes. In my own life, I think quite a bit about this. I'm a twenty-something woman who works part-time, with a husband who works full-time. We try hard to find mutuality* (he seems to look more for mutuality, I look more for equality, which is more difficult to find) but we struggle constantly against our childhood experiences of gender roles. So, these articles inspired much thought and contemplation for me as well; sometimes I thought "Yeah, that's how I feel," or sometimes I was inspired to strive for more mutuality in our relationship.

*Mutuality is one good way to describe the ideal relationship between men and women in society. Mutual is defined as "done, felt, etc. by each of two or more for or toward the other or others; reciprocal" and "of, or having the same relationship toward, each other or one another." Equal is defined as "of the same quantity, size, number, value, degree, intensity, quality, etc." So while equality remains important in terms of access to jobs, health, wealth, education, etc.; mutuality might make more sense in guiding relationships. If the people involved in the relationship feel as if they are working together with mutual goals and for the mutual good of all involved, this may work better than equality in relationships.

At our wedding, we sang the hymn, "Will you let me be your servant" (The Servant Song). This popular hymn provides guidelines for all human relationships. A few of its lines include,

Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you? Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey, we are trav'lers on the road. We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load . . .

The Bible is full of verses that support these sentiments in relation to family relationships, relationships among Christians, and relationships with all humans (Mark 10:43–45; Romans 14:19; and 1 Peter 4:8–11). The variety of ways these verses can be, and have been, interpreted are as numerous as the individuals who have read the verses. We bring our own perspectives to anything we read. Some Christians might read these verses quite literally since they see the Bible as the irrefutable Word of God. Other Christians approach the Bible taking into consideration the social environment in which that particular text was written and what a particular verse or story means as a story (metaphor). So, as long as there is more than one person reading the Bible, we will have different interpretations of the Bible.

I hope you enjoy the perspectives in this issue. I'm sure it will inspire much thought and contemplation for you as well!

—Patricia Haverstick, editor



From the desk

- **Scarves for sale.** At the Gifts of the Red Tent conference, red handcrafted silk scarves were sold. The scarves were made by Madhya Kalikata Shilpangan (MKS), a women's co-operative from Calcutta, India. MKS partners with Ten Thousand Villages. The logo was created by Teresa Pankratz (from Chicago, Illinois, and the illustrator of the *Women's Concerns Report*) and the scarf was designed by Mary Lou Weaver Houser (an artist from Lancaster, Pennsylvania). We still have a number of the square scarves (35" x 35") available. You can purchase the scarf for \$20 plus \$3 shipping. Please contact Patricia Haverstick, MCC U.S. Women's Concerns, at 717-859-1151 or tjh@mccus.org.
- **30th anniversary Web site.** Are you interested in learning more about the history of the Women's Concerns Desk? 2003 marked the 30th anniversary of the Women's Concerns Desk, and a Web site feature has been created to honor this occasion. Please visit www.mcc.org/us/womensconcerns/anniversary/ to find out more. Also, don't forget to check out the MCC Abuse Web site at www.mcc.org/abuse.

Chicano soul y la mujer Mexicana

Reflections on gender roles and the post-modern condition

by Maribel Ramírez Hinojosa
and Felipe Hinojosa

Maribel Ramírez Hinojosa and Felipe Hinojosa have been married for three and a half years and live in Edinburg, Texas. Maribel is a psychotherapist working toward a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and Felipe is a peace and justice staff person for MCC and is finishing up a Master's degree in Chicano History. They attend and help out with the youth at Iglesia Menonita Buenas Nuevas, San Juan, Texas.

MARIBEL: I always knew that I wanted a traditional Mexican home; one where marriage is a partnership in which we both contribute to the household.

EL CHICANO: One of the major discussions that I, a Chicano, and my Mexican wife have revolves around the beautiful and dangerous topic of the gender roles that define us. There is no doubt that we are the post-modern and post-colonial resemblance of hybrid culture. We live in a delicate border region, we come from urban and rural culture, we are representative of the 1860 Mennonite chasm (Maribel is Mennonite Brethren and I am Mennonite Church USA), and we represent a reunification of Mexican families that were displaced in 1848 (Maribel was born in northern Mexico [*Norteña*] and I in southern Texas [*Tejano*]). 1848 was the year that Mexicans in the Southwest became racialized Americans and Mexicans south of the Rio Grande lost part of their country and soul. But Mexicans, on both sides, have been resilient and have created and re-created what it means to be Mexican in a *gringo* world. When we joined in marriage we brought not only our personal histories, but also our collective stories of colonization, the imaginative and resistant community, and *vaqueros* (cowboys) in the true sense (before the *vaquero* idea was appropriated by Anglo men). We are brought together, with all this history, creating a dangerous and beautiful tension that defines our newlywed existence.

LA MUJER MEXICANA: I always knew that I wanted a traditional Mexican home; one where marriage is a partnership in which we both contribute to the household. I grew up seeing women taking care of the inside of the home while men took care of the outside chores. Now that both Felipe and I work outside of the home, we are attempting to create a contemporary/traditional Mexican home. The latter is very important to me because it is part of my identity of who I am. A traditional home is one in which specific Mexican values are adhered to, holidays are celebrated, foods are eaten and *tes* (herbal teas) are drunk. This is a home in which the Spanish language is spoken and family

gathers to celebrate and dance to Mexican music. A contemporary home is one in which we both contribute to the fulfillment of a traditional home. My husband and I both cook, clean, work and study.

EL CHICANO: With all this in mind, my wife and I debate over what our specific gender roles are. Sometimes I come home and sit on the couch and yell, "*tengo hambre*," (I'm hungry) and all I hear from the home office where my wife is working toward a Ph.D. is, "*pues, levántate del sillón mi corazón*" (then get up from the sofa, my love). I run to the office claiming that we are part of a larger tradition that has already defined our roles and that if we are to continue our Mexican-ness, then she must cook and I must cut the *sacate* (grass) or something. She smiles, ignores me, and continues typing her paper on "Therapeutic Approaches with Mexican Immigrant Families." On another, more serious occasion, my wife cries to me about her struggle with the María Complex (the María Complex is the struggle with how to be a professional Mexican woman while still being true to traditional culture). I sometimes wonder if I struggle with the "José Complex" because my wife makes more money than I do, I do most of the cooking, and for some strange reason I am very particular about how one does laundry. I am also very particular about the aroma in the home, how much cereal we have in the house, and how long left-over *arroz* (rice) and *frijoles* (beans) have been in the fridge.

LA MUJER MEXICANA: I am grateful that Felipe didn't have any problems contributing to making our home contemporary and traditional, or, as he calls it, a post-modern and post-colonial resemblance of hybrid culture. While I knew that to be the ideal, I had a difficult time actually implementing and living out these post-modern roles. The role of the traditional Mexican woman is so ingrained that I began to feel guilty for not taking care of the entire household and for not having time to embroider or sew as I always thought I would (the María Com-



plex Felipe wrote about). Both school and work don't permit me the time to carry out my ideal. While I still have trouble completely embracing my reality, I have begun to understand that Mexican women from *el rancho* are able to do all they do because their husbands work and they stay at home; they are not working outside of their home and studying to obtain their Ph.D. Even Mexican women who live in the city have different roles than those who live in the *ranchos*. And if those who work and live in larger cities have different roles than those who live in smaller rural towns in Mexico, how could I expect for it to be the same for me? Besides, that wasn't what I wanted anyway.

EL CHICANO: From the very beginning we both knew that our marriage would be drastically different from our parents' marriages. Not that our parents had bad marriages—we come surprisingly from relatively healthy homes—but in the way our parents interacted in the home and how society's gender roles defined them. Dad did the outside work and mom took care of all the inside work. It was an unspoken agreement that was continually affirmed by the Chicano/Mexican community around them.

When Maribel and I talk about how gender roles are changing, we often talk about how much hidden power women really hold within our communities. For example, we know that for the most part Mexican/Chicana women handle the finances in the home. Women also create and re-create the home space in such a manner that home becomes holy ground for Chicano and Mexican men. The space that Mexican/Chicana women create helps define and maintain their commitment to each other. When we visit Maribel's family in Mexico, I join the Mexican men who sit outside talking mostly about monotonous topics such as work and the weather. We hardly ever share stories like the women, and most of the time we sit in silence, perhaps in awe, when we hear the women inside the kitchen laughing at the *chisme* (gossip) they share with each other.

Gender roles are changing within our communities, but they are changing in ways that accommodate our post-modern condition, while still remaining true to our history. My wife and I are part of a larger movement within our Chicano/Mexican community that is redefining gender roles while maintaining all that is good about our tradition. I am a blessed man to have

FELIPE: I sometimes wonder if I struggle with the "José Complex" because my wife makes more money than I do, I do most of the cooking, and for some strange reason I am very particular about how one does laundry.

a wife that cares about the elasticity and maintenance of our culture.

LA MUJER MEXICANA: On one occasion, Felipe walked into the kitchen to see what the women were doing and how he could help. As soon as he walked in, the kitchen grew silent as the laughter subsided. Felipe had invaded a sacred place where only women were welcome as they prepared the tamales. It is our time, our sacred space. It is not one woman cooking for everyone, it is a room full of women empowering each other and freedom is lost when a man is present. My husband quickly figured out that it was not his time to help in the kitchen and he again joined the men outside.

There have been other times, though, when a smaller group of women making tamales actually encouraged the men to help. I was pleased to see my grandfather and husband help us make tamales and not leave until the work was done. We have a traditional home, and tradition is dynamic and is constantly being redefined. In this redefinition of tradition, there is a time and a place for everything; a time for women and men to be together and a time for us to be apart. I am very happy and thankful for my spouse and could not imagine having a more supportive and understanding husband. ♦

Mutuality at work

by Sheila Klassen-Wiebe

Sheila Klassen-Wiebe lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and works at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) as Assistant Professor of New Testament. She has been teaching at CMU and, previously, at Canadian Mennonite Bible College since 1993. She is married to Vern Klassen-Wiebe and they have three daughters, ages 15, 11, and 7. They are members at Charleswood Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

A few years ago, I was fascinated to hear my daughter, who was playing with her dolls, say that the “mom” doll was going to the office to work, while the children played at home. I’m not sure where the “dad” doll was, but my guess is that he would have been baking bread had he been in the picture. This incident brought home to me how much our children’s play mirrors their world and their reality. Moreover, I was startled to realize how extremely different my daughters’ experiences of men’s and women’s roles are from what they were for me when I was growing up.

I grew up on a farm with fairly traditional gender roles in the family and in my home church. Men did the farm work and had the paying jobs; women cooked the meals, cleaned the house, tended gardens large enough to feed the neighbourhood, and generally kept the household running smoothly. At the same time, because I grew up in a farm family, my father was always “home” and, consequently, very centrally involved in the daily lives of his children. In church, men were the ones who preached, led worship, conducted the choir, and served as congregational chairpersons and deacons. Women taught Sunday school, ran summer Bible school, served in ladies’ aids, and made things for

the MCC sale. I remember feeling slightly disoriented the first time a woman spoke in the pulpit at my home congregation. Yet despite growing up with these fairly traditional gender roles, I somehow did not receive the message (or did not hear it!) that there were certain things that I, as a girl, could not or should not do.

Now, several decades later, I teach Bible in a Christian university, and my career has developed in an age when being a woman has been a distinct advantage for me. I have received affirmation, encouragement, and support in my theological studies and in my teaching career. My husband, who grew up with similar gender role models in home and church as I did, has not had nearly the opportunities and open doors that I have had in my career (he is also an academic, also a biblical scholar, and also attended graduate school at the same time I did). He has been the one that has been the primary care giver for our children and has done a variety of work that has allowed him to work out of the home part-time and to have a flexible schedule. He is still the one that is home for our children when they come home from school, and he does many of the domestic chores. In the church we attend, roles are also dramatically different from what I grew up with. For example, our daughters do not

even notice when all the primary leadership roles on a Sunday morning are being filled by women.

I usually take for granted the roles that my husband and I have in our work and family but occasionally I realize what a profound impact these roles have had on our self-identity as individuals and as a couple, and how deeply they have shaped our daughters' assumptions about male and female roles. At times I am also reminded that the roles we have in our family are not as common as I might think. When my husband regularly took our preschooler to the playground a few years ago, the other parents there were usually moms, and he often felt profoundly alone in his role. And when I attend work-related board meetings and pastors' conferences, I frequently still see primarily dark-suited men around the table. When I encounter situations like these and when I overhear our daughter playing "mom at the office," I am prompted to ask, "How did we get here? What—or who—has led us to this place?" Although the current roles in my family are indeed the result of some intentional choices and theological convictions, I would not have envisioned twenty years ago where we are today. Rather, God has led us along, step by small step, and our respective roles are the result of many small, incremental decisions and choices. What follows is some initial reflection on male and female roles in *our* particular life experience; it is not intended to and cannot be prescriptive or even comprehensive in its analysis.

My husband and I began our marriage with a strong common commitment to mutuality in our relationship, a commitment rooted and grounded in our biblical and theological understanding of men's and women's roles. Both men and women are created in the image of God and both men and women are guilty of sin, of trying to overstep the limits God established for them, and in need of salvation (Genesis 1–3). Jesus called both men and women to be his follow-

ers and to participate in his kingdom work. In the early church, both men and women had leadership roles and were given gifts to use for the up-building of the body of Christ (Philippians 4:3; Corinthians 12; Romans 16; and many others). In Christ, enmity between Jew and Gentile, man and woman, slave and free has been overcome (Galatians 3:28). In Christ, relationships between husbands and wives are to be governed by mutual servanthood, love, and respect (Ephesians 5:21). This biblical-theological understanding could not remain abstract but had to be reflected concretely in the decisions we made in our marriage. We decided to make life decisions and career choices together rather than assuming that the goals of one of us took precedence over the other; and we would strive to share work and parenting. We realized that at times those decisions would seem contrary to the prevailing cultural, social, and religious norms we had grown up with. These marriage commitments resulted in our sharing a teaching position at a Bible school for several years, and in both of us going to seminary and graduate school to study.

Sharing work and study was relatively easy at first. With the birth of our children and further career developments, over the years our commitment to mutuality in work and parenting has encountered both opportunities and challenges. One of the challenges

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We decided to make life decisions and career choices together rather than assuming that the goals of one of us took precedence over the other; and we would strive to share work and parenting.

has been to understand the meaning of “call” and how God leads. Strong affirmation from my academic and faith communities over the years provided confirmation for me that God was leading me and calling me into a teaching ministry. The greater demand for women in teaching positions has worked to my advantage, and I have interpreted the opening of unexpected doors as God’s leading. My convictions regarding God’s call and leading in my own life, however, have led to equally profound and challenging questions about what “call” and God’s leading mean in my husband’s life. What does “call” mean when a desire to study and to teach is not matched by the same open doors and community voices affirming and confirming that call? The changing roles of men and women in church, society, and academia, which benefited me, have negatively affected him. How does one discern God’s guidance in the midst of social changes that benefit some of God’s children and not others? While both my husband and I have come to see God’s presence and leading in the many and varied vocational opportunities he has had, some of the nagging questions about what is “call,” and how inner call relates to outer call, are not fully resolved.

I stated earlier that our commitment to mutuality in our marriage relationship, work, and parenting resulted in certain conscious choices and decisions. One of those choices was that, as much as possible, we would not both work full-time when we had young children, that they would not be in childcare more than half-time, and that we would share parenting responsibilities. The upshot of this has been that my husband has been the primary caregiver for our children for most of their younger years. And that, of course, has had numerous implications. Despite our convictions that this was the best for us as a family, both my husband and I have struggled with identity and roles. I have felt the tension of wanting to be a great mom (which surely *must* mean staying home with my children, as my mother did for me!) as well as a good teacher and scholar, and feeling less than adequate in both. My husband has experienced both the delights and rewards of being more involved in his daughters’ daily lives than many fathers in the past and the feeling that he isn’t contributing

enough to the family income (traditionally the male role in the family). At the same time, our daughters are growing up knowing that both men and women can have a variety of roles in the family, in society, and in the church, and that the faithful use of God’s gifts can mean many different things. Perhaps older stereotypes of what are “fatherly” qualities and what are “mothering” qualities are also being broken for them, and I wonder how that will influence their language for and images of God. While all our language and images of God are limited and finite, we do use and need to use anthropomorphic language to express our relationship to the Creator. Will having a father who bakes bread and is around to kiss banged knees and a mother who preaches sermons and stays up late preparing lectures influence what it means for our girls to call God “Father” and “Mother”? Brian Wren’s hymn “Bring many names” plays with these images of God in a way that subverts old stereotypes and suggests the richness of our relationship to our God who is both Father and Mother:

Strong mother God, working night and day, planning all the wonders of creation, setting each equation, genius at play: Hail and Hosanna, strong mother God!

Warm father God, hugging every child, feeling all the strains of human living, caring and forgiving till we’re reconciled: Hail and Hosanna, warm father God!

My husband and I had very few role models of women who were successfully combining teaching, graduate studies, and parenting; and very few role models of men who had chosen not to work outside the home full-time but to stay home raising their children. Although many of the young women and men I teach do not have the same stereotypes about male and female roles in family, church, and society as the previous generation; many assumptions, questions, and challenges remain. It is vitally important that these young women and men see and hear that there is room in God’s kingdom for a great variety of roles and combinations of roles and that we discern together what it means to be the people of God as women and men, all created in the image of God and all gifted by God for the mutual building up of the body of Christ. ♦

Our daughters are growing up knowing that both men and women can have a variety of roles in the family, in society, and in the church, and that the faithful use of God’s gifts can mean many different things.

Willing to serve each other

As a child in a rural Mennonite community, I knew what men and women were expected to do. My father spent a good deal of time outdoors—working up ground, feeding animals, hauling grain, and making repairs around the farm—and left the duties of the yard and the house in the capable managerial hands of my mother. Mom sewed new clothes and mended the old for her seven children, tended a large garden, and set up a farm kitchen canning factory in the summertime to preserve tomatoes, green beans, and pears in quart jars by the dozen. My parents appeared to have clear role divisions that guided them through the work routines of our Ohio farm and that, for the most part, kept them in separate domains. The primary exception to that came in the spring and the fall when my mom joined my dad in the fields for planting and harvest on numerous occasions.

I saw my Dad—like other men of his generation in our church—as a husband and father who took seriously his role to provide for his family. He worked very hard, and expected my mom and other adults to do the same. Women were seen as helpers, and in his eyes maintained an identity very much through their husbands. Many times I heard my dad refer to a woman with a title such as “Henry’s wife” rather than using her first name. When a woman was referred to by her given name, Dad would often not be satisfied until he knew who her husband was; it gave him a point of reference that he could relate to. He was not unusual in that respect; many of his peers followed a similar pattern.

Within our home, my mother was the caregiver of the children in both physical and emotional ways. She got up at night with sick or frightened young ones and stayed home with them on Sunday if they were not well enough to go to church. When dad came in the house after working long hours around the farm, he was largely “off duty.” However, he did, at times, express clear opinions about how the household should be run, and regularly took leadership in initiating prayer

and Scripture reading after the evening meal during my early childhood.

As my siblings grew older and established their own homes, it became evident that their pattern of parenting would vary from that of our parents. My mother watched her son and sons-in-law care for their young children and commented on several occasions that her daughters enjoyed so much more help at home than she had had. Her children and their spouses shared parenting in more ways than they had observed growing up. As children required attention, the responsibilities were negotiated with questions such as: “Do you want to start the baths for the older two while I change the baby’s diaper?” My parents’ role divisions were clearer and required less communication, and their responsibilities also overlapped less than those of the generation that followed them.

When my husband, Jon, and I got married, he brought to our relationship assumptions regarding roles that were quite different than the ones my father had on the farm. While we were both in college and had similar schedules, Jon and I shared cooking and cleaning responsibilities and each maintained part-time jobs. During my senior year, Jon assumed the role of full-time house parent while we served at a home for children in foster care. The next phase of our lives took us to Latin

by Dawn Yutzy Showalter

Dawn Yutzy Showalter lives in rural central Ohio with her husband, Jon, and their four children between the ages of 5 and 12. They attend Shiloh Mennonite Church, which is a part of the Conservative Mennonite Conference. Dawn and her family plan to spend next year in China teaching English and relating to university students. She enjoys ethnic foods, news magazines, flowers, exploring new places with her husband, and hugs from their children.

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Both Jon and I recognize his place as spiritual leader as he watches out for the spiritual needs of the family, but together we discuss how we can build Christian values and biblical truth into the lives of our children.

America to work with a small church for three years. There, in the context of female/male role distinctions even more traditional than those with which I grew up, my closest friend confided to me one day that she would really like to marry someone who served at home the way Jon did. Our responsibilities continued to shift in the following years as Jon again became a student and I returned to work as a social worker.

The births of our four children, along with our subsequent decisions that I would stay at home to care for them while they were young, and later to teach them at home as they reached school-age, have resulted in a more traditional division of labor than we had previously. I have more time in the kitchen to think about what to start for dinner, so cooking is primarily my responsibility with the important exceptions of Saturday morning and Sunday evening. Both Jon and I recognize his place as spiritual leader as he watches

out for the spiritual needs of the family, but together we discuss how we can build Christian values and biblical truth into the lives of our children.

We're now living again in the same rural Mennonite community in which I grew up, and interact with friends who live much like we do—with patterns that are traditional in some ways but perhaps unconventional compared to those of an earlier generation. Among them I see numerous other examples of fathers who are actively involved with the care of their children, fathers who willingly and comfortably step in for an evening or weekend as single parent in the absence of their wives. In many cases, I observe generous respect flowing from our male friends to their wives, and I witness a soberness about the responsibility of being godly fathers and husbands. In our home, as well as in others, I see Christian men who walk in the front door not expecting to be served, but ready to look for ways in which they can serve. ♦

Secular vs. religious roles

by Brenda Carrasco

Brenda Carrasco is a member of the New Holland Spanish Mennonite Church in New Holland, Pennsylvania. She lives in Lynchburg, Virginia, where she attends Liberty University and plans to pursue nursing.

There is no one event that I see shaping my view of a man's role during my teenage years, but many that accumulated to create a "women power" mentality.

As I sit down to write this article, I find it hard to explain my thoughts on men and what I see their roles to be. I'll be honest with you; I don't really have any exact idea of what a man's role is. Not only that, but I don't see a man's role in the church to be the same as that of a man in society. Every time I claim to have it figured out, experience causes that idea to change.

As a child, I was a dreamer. Children's stories are full of heroic men; the knight in shining armor, prince charming, the knight off to save the damsel in distress. I am somewhat embarrassed to admit, that as a young child, I fully expected men to be the heroes, the providers, and the one who would someday free me from my as yet to be defined prisons. Looking back, I realize my own family didn't fit the fanciful ideas I held. My father was a recent immigrant from Bolivia and needed

additional education to work in the United States, so my mother, a nurse, provided for the family. In Bolivia, my father was the director of a private school as well as a pastor and church leader. When he and my mother decided to move our family to the United States in 1983, he had to start over. He attended school, first to learn English, and later to get his degree in Hispanic Ministries. He may not have been a financial provider, but he was the head of the house, a hard worker, and he was following what he felt his calling to be, and that was serving God and the Church. He was my hero.

But of course, I got older. Children's stories were no longer what I based my reality on. I started to look at the men in my life and just accept that having men in charge was the way life worked. As with most girls who have a father in their life, my dad was the main male figure in my life. By this point, he was the pastor of a

church and involved in leadership with the Hispanic Mennonite Council. Other men in my church were also involved in leadership, but rarely did I see women in leadership roles. At the same time, a conflicting message was coming from other sources. I kept hearing that women could also be in leadership roles, they could be whatever they wanted to be. I believed both messages; men weren't the only ones who could be company presidents, entrepreneurs, and lawyers—women were in power, too; yet, at the same time, somehow this didn't apply to the church.

Life changes from the time one is twelve. There is no one event that I see shaping my view of a man's role during my teenage years, but many that accumulated to create a "women power" mentality. One large part of this had to do with my greatest male influence, my father. He died when I was 14. While this was a huge shock to me, I saw my family adjust, and my mother take over some of the roles my father had played in my life. Don't begin to imagine that she took his place, or even that she did a better job than he did—it was just different, but it worked. I was once again presented with this idea that women were filling men's roles and achieving and even surpassing the accomplishments of men. I even began to see changes in the church, not so much in my own church, although there was change, but through exposure to other churches and ideas. Women preachers were a great blessing to me. In my mind, they were better than most of the male preachers I had heard because they brought new perspectives. I wish now I could remember their names, but who was preaching was never as intriguing as what they were preaching about. I myself was reluctantly pushed into what I saw as a leadership position as president of the youth group. Once in the position, I enjoyed it and thought I did a good job. Women were leaders in the church, and good ones at that. Men were no longer the ones with the upper hand when it came to leadership in the church; my general attitude was "men, move over—it's the women's turn now."

While I held these ideas, I was firm in my belief that this was the way God intended it to be, and that it was the church holding



onto ancient ideas of male superiority that had suppressed women and their God-given gifts to minister. While I still hold to this idea somewhat, I no longer am quite the crusader I once was. I have come to believe that men and women are equal when it comes to their abilities in the secular world, but that their roles in the church are still somewhat different. After some personal study and discussion with men and women of the church whom I greatly respect, I believe it is a man that is called to pastor a church and be the spiritual head of a congregation. That being said, I applaud the church and its efforts to recognize and use the God-given gifts of the men and women of the church. I still believe that women have been given gifts that lend to ministering from the pulpit, bringing the messages of God to both men and women in a congregation. I am grateful to my own church for enabling me to explore my own gifts and allowing me to use them in the church, and I hope that they continue to do this with younger generations. ♦

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No clear rules

by Wesley Penner

Wesley Penner spent most of his life in sub-urban Winnipeg, Manitoba. His parents immigrated from Paraguay in the 1970's and settled in the predominantly Mennonite community of North Kildonan in Winnipeg. Wes went to a Mennonite private high school and graduated from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor's of Science in Computer Engineering. Currently, he volunteers with MCC in the computer services department, serving in his second term as a programmer/analyst.

There are three main places in my life where I've seen and experienced (at least in some small way) the changing roles of men. These places are at home (the family), at work, and in the church. Of the places where men's roles are changing, the issue I've struggled with the most is man's role in the church and the change that I've seen happening. So I'll start with the places where I haven't struggled as much yet.

The man's role in the family: My mom and dad had definite roles in the family and I came to understand these as what should be normal. It worked well for my parent's. For example, my mom cooked and baked (the best at it in my opinion);

my dad worked very hard, did house maintenance, outside work and he drove the car all the time. There were some jobs with overlap though; for example, my dad would barbecue, my mom would do some outside work and although my mom wasn't the main source of income, she often had a job away from home.

Families are changing in Canada in a big way. The general direction of a man's role in the family, as I observe, is towards no clear role definition or responsibilities, but one in which the married couple decides, debates and argues about the roles each should fill.

Man's role in the workplace has been changing over a longer period of time as women move more often into positions of power within organizations. I've been brought up to respect women in the workplace in the same way I would men. I've had women both as peers and supervisors.

For the most part, computer-related work is male dominated and, going by the statistics, I will usually work more often with men than women even though this is slowly changing. MCC Binational has had one female computer services manager since I've worked here and MCC Canada's current computer services manager is a woman. These changes are recent and are a reflection of the change that is happening.

My church is a General Conference Mennonite Church, now Mennonite Church Canada, and is German bilingual. I grew up in this church and am a member there. Growing up, men preached the sermon upstairs and women taught the children's Sunday school classes downstairs. There were a few guys who taught a young children's class, and usually there was at least one guy teaching the junior high students and always a guy teaching the youth. While there were many different jobs at church, the leadership consisted of men.

During my university internship program, I worked in northern Manitoba in the city of Thompson. While I was there, I went to the local Mennonite church, which at that time



had a female pastor. This was a first for me. I didn't think too much of this, though, until I was challenged by a friend of mine who struggled with the fact that the Mennonite church had a woman pastor, and he cited scripture and teaching that he had grown up with as his objections.

There are many changes happening in the church in leadership positions in general. There have been a number of times where a woman shared a message for the Sunday service at my home church. This was a big step for many of the people there.

What do these changes mean for me as a young unmarried Christian man? The expectations that I grew up with are changing and have been for a long time. Are the changes good or bad? Are they against scripture or just a cultural shift in the biblical perspective? What does God think about this? How should I react? Why are the roles changing? Is it cultural evolution? Are the traditional roles being given up by men because they are not satisfying or are women taking a fair share of power and respect that they deserve?

The more I've thought about the issues, the more questions I leave un-answered, but here is something that I know for sure: Men's roles will continue to change.

As I struggle with the questions, I will continue to look to the Bible for direction and pray for understanding on how I should live my life in light of these continuing changes. How does this affect the good news of Jesus, which I claim is the same now as it was at first, if I say that change in society means change in traditional biblical views? Has the curse from the fall pronounced in Genesis 3 changed? How does the modern day culture affect how I interpret scripture?

For myself, I will live my life following Jesus as best I can. In the family, men should love their wives. At work, men need to treat women with the same respect as they would men in the same position. In the church, men, just like women, should not forget their calling to go out into all the world preaching the gospel. As for the details (which there are many), I have many thoughts but no clear rules. ♦

The expectations that I grew up with are changing and have been changing for a long time. Are the changes good or bad? Are they against scripture or just a cultural shift in the biblical perspective?

Blending traditions and experiences

Reflections on the changing roles of men—he said: For the last few decades on reserves and reservations across North America, there have been many efforts to organize at the grassroots level for positive change. Most indigenous people deal daily with the myriad of social problems caused by living for many generations under an oppressive governmental system. Positive change is most desired.

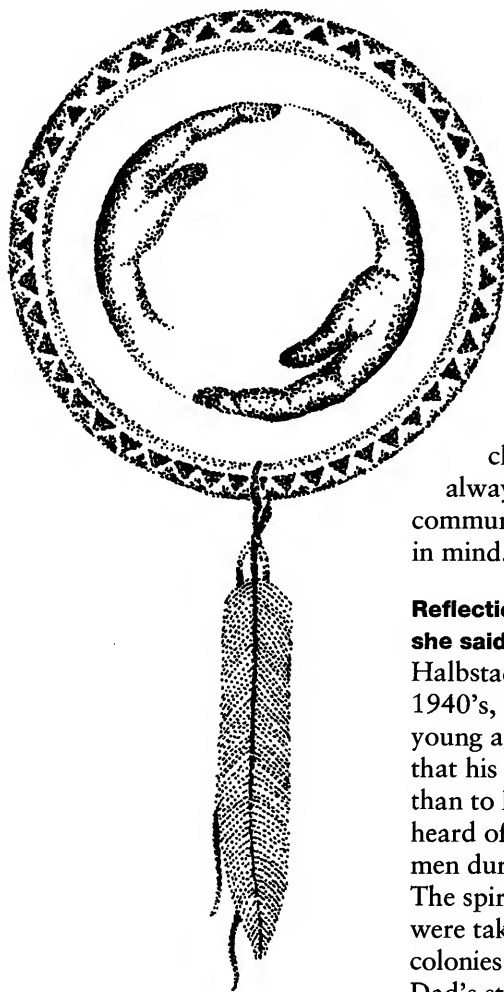
To hear of a call for a community meeting to address these problems is a common daily occurrence on the Pine Ridge Reservation. For decades, especially during the 1970's through the late 1990's, it was the norm that the majority of people involved in any given community organizing effort were women. These events were not billed as women only, but as community meetings. Long-time female community

activists will often hark back to the many years of meetings that were attended by women only. Nowadays, they will happily acknowledge the men who attend the meetings. During community organizing efforts, a part of the strategizing often focuses on how to get more men involved.

When traditional Lakota people talk about how life was before contact with Europeans, they often point out that everyone had roles within the community. Every role was of equal value. The community chose a leader, usually a man, for his wisdom, displays of generosity, sound reputation, and way of life that showed to all that he would be capable to lead. For the leader chosen, the role demanded that he not lead by telling the people what to do, but by listening to their needs, observ-

by Harley and Sue Eagle

Harley and Sue Eagle are a married couple of mixed ancestry. She is Russian Mennonite and he is Dakota/Saulteaux First Nations. It makes for an interesting and enriching marriage. The understanding they bring of men's changing roles comes from the Mennonite as well as Dakota First Nations traditions. They have two children, Danielle (4) and Emma (2). They recently completed an MCC term with the Oglala Lakota people on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Presently, Harley is working as a Restorative Justice advocate and Dismantling Racism trainer. Sue, a social worker, is involved part time in supportive care work in three residential homes.



In many indigenous cultures, women held the right to keep men in line when behavior was seen as unhealthy, when egos ran too high or when responsibility was being neglected.

ing and basing decisions on the values and teachings that were important to the people. Paying particularly close attention to the wisdom of women was key. In many indigenous cultures, women held the right to keep men in line when behavior was seen as unhealthy, when egos ran too high or when responsibility was being neglected. The reason for this check and balance was that women always kept the best interest of the community's children and their future in mind.

Reflections on the changing roles of men—

she said: My father, who grew up in Neu Halbstadt, Ukraine, in the late 1920's to 1940's, lost his father to tuberculosis at a young age. He was later told he was lucky that his father died of tuberculosis rather than to have him taken away and never heard of again as happened to so many men during that time of Communist rule. The spiritual and community leaders were taken first from Russian Mennonite colonies in an attempt to break the people. Dad's stories of the hardships in his past include his mother's selflessness and generosity to others who had less, even though their family did not have enough. She had faith that God would keep them and the strength to carry on regardless what the future might hold. She worked hard to sustain the family, taking on the night watchman's job my Opa (grandfather) had held before he died, in order for the family to earn enough to survive. My father had to take on an adult role of wage earner for the family, working on the collective alongside men, working the land and taking care of the horses and cattle. My father did not have male role models in his family to teach him how to be a man, but the way I see it, by living the way she did, my Oma (grandmother) taught by example how to be a respectful, responsible and balanced human being.

I think that women have always been leaders in Russian Mennonite society, being the backbone of our communities and families. They have been the teachers

of spiritual matters, the recorders (both oral and written) of our family histories, the supporters of our Mennonite schools, and the ones to ensure that family ties are maintained through letters, reunions and visits to those living far away. Time and again, throughout history, our Mennonite mothers have had to face uncertain futures after their life partners were ripped from them during upheavals of revolution and war. The women left behind held things together for the sake of their families. They were the role models for the sons they had to raise alone, and the ones to take on responsibilities that had once been filled by their husbands and other men in the community.

They said: Perhaps we have been fooling ourselves as a society into believing that men are natural leaders and have a God-given right to have dominion over humanity. If men demand or are handed leadership roles simply because they are men and forget how to listen to those being led, and base decisions on things other than the continued cycle of healthy harmony, humanity runs into trouble. As a couple, what we have observed from our heritages is the importance of relationship and connection. Recognizing and respecting the connection to our children, to our spouses, to our extended families, and to our communities encourages us to take responsibility for their well-being. We need to remember the values and teachings we hold as vital to our identity and act accordingly. We need to understand and respect our connection with those in our families present and past or we may forget who we are as a people. Our links to the past ground us in the future, by reminding us where we've been, what we've experienced, and which actions that we've taken collectively have served to strengthen us, or made us weaker. Our roles do not have to be arranged hierarchically or according to gender. Roles can be understood as different, but equal in importance. One's gender doesn't have to be the greatest defining factor regarding what roles one will take on. ♦

To the editor:

GREETINGS FROM CHIMOIO, MOZAMBIQUE! What a blessing to read Ms. Voth's article, "I have a dream," in the November–December issue of *Women's Concerns Report*. Living and learning in the Mozambican culture, I have realized how little people, especially women, speak of dreams for their futures. And it's not just in this culture, but mine and others as well. I resonated with the questions, "Do I dare to speak what I dream of? Must I name what I hope for so it can be realized

in the future?" Fears of various sorts keep us from sharing our vision with others. Where do our dreams originate? Do we believe that they simply come from a foreign land in our minds . . . or do they come from somewhere divine?

May we all have the courage and wisdom to follow Ms. Voth's example and share our dreams. Thank you.

Jennifer Johnson
MCC Mozambique

Sisters in Spirit campaign. On March 22, 2004, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) launched a one-year campaign to lobby the federal government (Canadian) to establish a \$10 million fund for research and education related to violence against Aboriginal women. Over the past 20 years, approximately 500 Aboriginal women have gone disappeared, or have been murdered in communities across Canada. Please add your voice to the call for a federal fund by writing letters and meeting with members of parliament. For more information, go to the NWAC Web site, www.nwac-hq.org; or call 800-416-4043.

Seminary scholarships available. The Women in Leadership Subcommittee of Lancaster Mennonite Conference is seeking applicants for the Quiet Shouts Seminary Scholarship to be granted for the 2004–2005 academic year. This scholarship supports Lancaster Conference Mennonite women pursuing pastoral studies in seminary Masters degree programs. This scholarship is made possible through donations from individuals and through royalties from *Quiet Shouts*, a book authored by Louise Stoltzfus that features 14 Mennonite women leaders of the 20th century. Louise, a former editor of the *Women's Concerns Report*, died in November 2002. Donations towards this scholarship fund are welcome. For more information, contact Lancaster Mennonite Conference Office, 2160 Lincoln Highway East, Lancaster, PA 17602; or 717-293-5246.

Call for recipes. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Herald Press have approved plans to produce a new cookbook following in the tradition of "More-with-Less" and "Extending the Table." The book, to be written by nutritionist Mary Beth Lind and journalist Cathleen Hockman-Wert, will encourage eating locally produced foods, in season. At www.morewithless.org, recipes can be submitted for possible use in the book and you can volunteer to be a recipe tester. Highest priority will be given to recipes that use primarily ingredients that are ripe in one season. MCC constituents are invited to share their own reflections on eating with the seasons on the www.morewithless.org discussion board. Online forums are also available for the issues raised in "More-with-Less Cookbook" and "Extending the Table." Those without Web access may request a recipe submission form by calling MCC toll-free at 888-563-4676.

Prayer shawls. A ministry in which women (assumably, men can do this too!) knit shawls for new mothers and women with breast cancer has grown out of an initiative at Hartford Seminary. As the women continued to knit, they found broader reasons and needs to respond to. The book, *Knitting into Mystery*, by Susan Jorgensen and Susan Izard gives ideas on contemplative knitting and prayers to pray and to send with the shawls. For more information, visit www.shawlministry.com. Recommendations for knitting the shawls and accompanying prayers can be found at this Web site. ♦



Editor's note: The goal of this column is to offer a place for our readers to respond to the issues raised and the perspectives presented in *Report*. Although we try to print all letters, they may be shortened or edited to fit available space. All letters must be signed, but writers may request to have their names withheld.





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Women in church leadership

Elizabeth Redekopp became half-time associate pastor in October 2003 at Home Street Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Ilene Bergen began a pastorate at Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden, Ontario, in January 2004.

Erna Funk, along with her husband Henry, is part-time interim pastor at Aberdeen Mennonite Church, Aberdeen, Saskatchewan, as of February 2004.

Sharon Schultz is the student intern, and will become half-time pastor in May 2004, at Eyebrow Mennonite Church, Eyebrow, Saskatchewan.

Laura Koopmans is the youth pastor at Milverton Mennonite Fellowship, Milverton, Ontario, as of February 2004.

Beth Ann Lichti became the associate pastor in February 2004 at Listowel Mennonite Church, Listowel, Ontario.

Ingrid Loepp Thiessen, and her husband Jim, are intentional interim pastors at Avon Mennonite Church, Stratford, Ontario, as of February 2004.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT

Looking Forward

JULY-AUGUST 2004

Christian women
in education



SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2004

Women pastors



NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2004

Young women's voices